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ONTARIO STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL

STATEMENT

ON

CHILD CARE

TO THE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

DAY NURSERIES ACT

September 1984





The Ontario Status of Women Council is committed to the belief that the availability of child care is an essential service if women are to achieve full equality within our society. Children are our greatest human resource and must have care that will ensure development of their individual potential in a secure and stimulating environment. Today's costs for child care must be measured against tomorrow's costs for rehabilitation of abandoned, battered, disturbed or delinquent children.

As stated in previous briefs and documents concerning child care, the Ontario Status of Women Council is committed to the belief that the availability of accessible, affordable and quality child care is essential to attainment of full equality for women in Ontario. In order for women to participate in an equitable labour market, adequate child care facilities, programming and funding must be available.

The present situation is characterized by a variety of features, including:

- . the lack of a governing fundamental policy underlying child care programming and policy development;
- . an inadequate number of licensed child care spaces in the Province;
- . a system of day care subsidy which is based on a social welfare orientation to day care and results in inadequate accessibility to subsidized child care.

Data on the labour force participation of women suggests that the responsibility for child care prohibits women from exercising their right to take employment outside the home.

Child care should be available as a basic service provided to all citizens, not only for the immediate benefits to individual family members, but also for the long-term benefit and well being of the society.

The Council shares the position of the report of the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women that "the care of children is a responsibility to be shared by the mother, the father, and the society. Unless this shared responsibility is acknowledged and assumed, women cannot be accorded true equality."

Provision for quality child care is an essential component of equal opportunity in the labour force. Not only does child care relate to entry into the labour force, but clearly as women succeed in entering non-traditional and higher paying jobs, their needs for a full range of flexible child care must be met. No longer are women limited to "nine to five" jobs. Child care programs must include provisions for the weekends, late nights and away from home travelling that are frequently associated with professional or non-traditional occupations. Without provision for this type of child care, women will continue to be limited in terms of employment opportunities and career advancement.

The Council urges the Province of Ontario to undertake the development of a comprehensive child care policy designed to replace the welfare orientation of existing day care programs with policies and programs based on the premise that child care is a basic family support service provided to all citizens.

Available data indicates a serious shortage of licensed child care spaces for infant/toddler, pre-school and school-age children in the Province. The shortage of government licensed spaces and the costs and inaccessibility of existing spaces forces most families to make private child care arrangements. Estimates indicate that approximately 80% of the children of working mothers are in unlicensed day care arrangements. It is clear that the Province of Ontario must allocate more funds in order to establish adequate child care services to meet both present and future assets.


The existing cost-sharing arrangement between various levels of government encourages a social welfare orientation to child care. The Council opposes such an orientation in terms of its implications for both the nature of child care programs and the limitations on available and affordable child care.

Under the existing system, low income parents and parents of children with developmental or physical handicaps are subsidized. The vast majority of middle-income parents, however, are not eligible for subsidy and find the cost of supervised group care a heavy financial burden, or in many cases prohibitive.

The Council feels strongly that the existing funding arrangements limit the accessibility of child care to too small a proportion of families.

The Council also feels strongly that licensed child care is fundamentally an educational program and as such requires the necessary educational support systems for both group care and private home day care.

The educational orientation, however, should not in any way limit a diversity of facilities and programs available to families and does not imply



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complete integration with the existing educational system. It clearly does, however, require a shift from the welfare orientation which underlines existing funding arrangements toward a more developmental orientation.

In a previous brief, Council outlined its position on "the community school" concept. Community schools could provide child care and community centre programs in addition to existing elementary or secondary education programs. In light of declining school enrolment in Ontario, it is clear that the community school can represent an appropriate alternative to the use of existing resources - an alternative which would meet the needs of thousands of children requiring child care programs. As well, considerable savings on capital expenditures can be made by using existing school facilities in a major expansion program.

A community school is an institution which, under one roof, would provide:

- . child care
- . elementary education
- . community centre programs

The school could foster the social, emotional, physical and mental growth and learning of the individual and the family. It could develop an intergenerational partnership and function as a support system in the community.

The child care centre in a community school could offer care to all children who need it, ages 0 to 10. Recognizing that infant/toddler care is more feasible in the private home, the community school centre would have some space available to infant/toddler care when necessary, but most infant/toddler care would be handled through private home day care satellites.

Other care available at the centre could include:

- . all day early childhood education for pre-school children;
- . half day care for junior and senior kindergarten children;
- . before and after school care for school-age children.

The community school could be set up to adjust to many of the different forms of child care now available, varying from parent co-operative to Montessori nursery school.

The expansion of private home child care can be a positive means of expanding child care. However, studies indicate that more support for, and supervision of, home care is needed. Supervised private home child care in Ontario can provide excellent care for children as well as an opportunity for women working in the home to become an integral part of the mainstream of their communities. A satellite system can provide the care-giver with the necessary support and supervision.

The private home child care satellite could plug into the community school through the child care centre. The centre could provide the satellite with the following services:

- . back up care in case of child's or care-giver's illness;
- . mobile services by bus or van, bringing toys, books and other services from an equipment resource bank at the community school;
- . special enrichment programs at the child care centre;
- . regular supervisory visits to enable the satellites to grow and improve in quality;
- . group meetings of care-givers to exchange ideas, with specialized professionals invited to speak.

Private home child care is particularly suited to infant care where, under the Day Nurseries Act, the ratio of children to care-giver is excellent.

As they grow older and their socialization and spatial needs increase, the children can move to the community school child care centre. The satellite can act as an outlet for child care centre children who are ill. Care-givers would be considered part of the child care staff for purposes of further training and staff meetings. While functioning as a separate unit, these care-givers would be considered an integral part of the school with facilities and consultation available to them. This could be the means for improving the much maligned status of home care-givers.

The Council urges the Ontario Government to endorse the principle of community schools and to co-ordinate discussions with a variety of relevant ministries in order to outline plans for the development of community school programs to meet the needs of pre-school and school-age children throughout the Province.

Considerable debate has been focussed on the most appropriate location for child care programs in terms of community versus workplace. The Council endorses the principle that diversity is desired in all aspects of child care programming. For this reason, the Council feels that the Ontario Government should encourage private industry and unions, through tax incentives, to consider the desirability and feasibility of workplace child care facilities. While the Council recognizes that for many organizations and for parents, this may not be the preferred program, the Ontario Government should be prepared to encourage and provide financial support for innovative child care programs of all types.

Under the present funding/subsidy system, child care workers receive extremely poor wages in relation to their levels of training and compared to persons in similar occupations. In effect, child care workers are required to subsidize programs because of inadequate funding from the government.

In addition, child care workers are frequently in a double bind situation as they form a bond of commitment to the parents and may recognize that given existing funding levels, salary increases would make costs prohibitive for some parents. Given that child care is a labour intensive program, it is essential that government funding levels be increased to ensure fair wages for care-givers. The quality of remuneration of staff is an essential ingredient to responsible child care programming.

The Ontario Status of Women Council therefore recommends:

That Ontario develop a comprehensive child care policy designed to increase the availability of accessible, affordable child care in the Province. The policy should recognize child care is a vital family support service for anyone who needs it. Funding should not be exclusively for the socially-assisted segment of our society. Funding of child care should be based not only on a social welfare model, but also on an educational model. As a first step in the development of program elements in a comprehensive child care policy, the Government of Ontario should:

- 1) Enter into discussions with the federal government to re-negotiate the present child care funding arrangements under the Canada Assistance Plan;
- 2) Increase the total budget allocation for child care, including a major funding program to provide direct funding to municipalities, non-profit organizations and agencies to increase the number and accessibility of group child care spaces;
- 3) Introduce a graduated system of tax credits for child care expenses similar in structure to the property tax credit system;
- 4) Modify the formula for child care subsidies to expand availability of supervised child care to middle income families;

- 5) Expand the use of existing surplus classrooms for community schools which will provide child care and community centre programs in addition to existing elementary education programs.
- 6) Establish a province-wide centralized public information child care referral system through the educational system for use by parents seeking information on child care programs available in their community for both pre-school and school-age children;
- 7) Enable 24-hour child care facilities to assist professional and shift workers and to help parents cope with emergency situations;
- 8) Encourage management and unions in both private and public sector to address the child care needs of their employers;
- 9) Establish a tax incentive to encourage employers to provide workplace child care facilities where possible and desired;
- 10) Ensure that child care services in the home can be set up as a small business in order that care-givers can deduct expenses and that a formal schedule indicating deductions be incorporated into the Income Tax Act.

ONTARIO STATUS OF WOMEN COUNCIL MEMBERS

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September 15 - 16, 1984



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